

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program (MERLIN)

Balanced Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (BalanceD-MERL)

FACT SHEET



Organizations often prioritize one aspect of D-MERL at the expense of others, leading to D-MERL efforts that are not suited to the specific needs and context of the project, organization, Mission or Bureau's work, and that are often weak, lack application, do not lead to change, or are burdensome for beneficiaries.

THE CHALLENGE

MERL can be inefficient and researchers are not always attentive to the needs of the participants or the practitioners. In addition, the data collected may not be actionable or relevant to key stakeholders. Moreover, specific measurement approaches may not always be possible or appropriate. Lastly, inflexible frameworks make it difficult to adapt to local needs or constraints.

THE INNOVATION

The application of BalanceD-MERL can help produce flexible yet balanced and nimble D-MERL frameworks, and more relevant and actionable data for organizations seeking to achieve impact at scale. It also seeks to minimize the burden on D-MERL participants, practitioners, and data collectors, improve efficiency of D-MERL, improve the quality of information gathered, and facilitate organizational learning and the applied use of collected data. BalanceD-MERL recognizes that decision-makers often need help in determining when and how to measure change to create the most value for the organization and their stakeholders. It helps organizations develop right-fit M&E systems, which balance creating evidence on impact with operational data for program improvement.

THE APPROACH

This mechanism will develop and operationalize BalanceD-MERL principles by creating an organizational assessment tool and competency framework paired with a set of field guides, training manuals and other tools that will help practitioners to address their D-MERL needs in a practical manner. In addition, the BalanceD-MERL approach will be piloted with select USAID missions and programs, through targeted technical assistance. BalanceD-MERL is appropriate for operating units, offices and programs that have D-MERL needs and would like to explore pursuing those efforts in line with relevant, credible, responsible, right-sized, and utilization-focused principles. It should be considered when designing activities that could benefit from innovative approaches to conducting monitoring, evaluation, research and learning and a greater focus on the translation of rigorous research into decision-making.

QUICK FACTS

Principles: *Relevant, Credible, Responsible, Right-sized, Utilization-focused*

Funding mechanism: Cooperative Agreement (buy-in option for USAID operating units)

Partners: World Vision (prime), Innovations for Poverty Action, Institute for Development Impact, Search for Common Ground, The William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan

Period of Performance: 10/01/2015 – 9/30/2018

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